

Town Meeting Coordinating Meeting on June 26, 2008

1. **Call to Order:** Present were Harry Brooks, Nonny Burack, Carol Gray, Aaron Hayden, Stephanie O’Keeffe, Peggy Roberts, Mary Streeter. Town Meeting Moderator Harrison Gregg also attended.

2. **Meeting with Town Moderator:**

Debriefing about last Town Meeting. Peggy asked Harrison how TMCC can help to make Town Meeting function well. Harrison said TMCC had done a great job in the area of information. One area Harrison has thought TMCC could help with is encouraging people to run for Town Meeting and promoting greater awareness about Town Meeting, e.g., inform people about opportunities for running for Town Meeting. Harry said years ago one way Town Meeting was advertised was through the schools. Harry and another person met with the superintendent and asked to have one session to educate students about Town Meeting.

Harrison also mentioned the idea of electronic voting, noting that the technology is getting cheaper and cheaper.

Peggy asked Harrison if there were things that could have been better about Town Meeting. He thought in general things went well in Town Meeting. He thought people had their say and noted that there were a couple times when the vote on whether to end debate was defeated so debate was extended. Peggy noted that one new member said he was confused a couple of times about what was being voted on, so it was recommended that the question that was being voted be repeated right before the vote. Harrison said a couple people mentioned clarification would have been helpful regarding the purchase of 2 parcels from the Hills Mansion property on Main Street article. For example, right after the debate was over, they said they didn’t know if the owners of the Main Street property had said whether or not they would accept the price voted on by Town Meeting.

Harrison said the Massachusetts Moderators’ Association is doing a video about representative Town Meeting. It has already done one about Open Town Meetings and he thought it was quite good. Harrison had volunteered to send some footage from Amherst Town Meeting for the documentary still being made but apparently they had enough. The documentary is probably going to be coming out in the fall. Peggy suggested this documentary be played on ACTV. Harrison suggested TMCC have a forum at ACTV to show the video. Peggy suggested we also have a copy of the video for the shelf at the library. Harrison will let Peggy know when the video is ready.

Harrison said there’s a book called Town Meeting Times, in its Third Edition. It lays out a lot of special procedures of Town Meeting. It talks about issues that moderators face, but is helpful to anyone who is a Town Meeting member.

Mary suggested the moderator give additional time ‘without objection’ to anyone who asked for it, to increase civility in Town Meeting. Carol added that it would be helpful

not to have speakers make untimed presentations before Town Meeting begins (such as the economic development expert the Town Manager had brought in at an earlier Town Meeting). Nonny distinguished between that person's presentation and the untimed presentations by the Finance Committee which she thought was helpful. Some thought though that the Finance Committee presentation was still too long. Carol pointed out that one of the biggest complaints about Town Meeting is that it takes too long and it starts late, noting that the untimed speakers in the beginning contribute to that problem.

Stephanie suggested the moderator alternate red and green cards. Carol thought that would be helpful too and suggested that there be a general guideline about calling the question only after the debate be allowed to run and there are no new points being made by speakers. Stephanie suggested there be a reminder for new Town Meeting members about how you must make a motion BEFORE you speak to an article since it always takes one person making a mistake before the rest of Town Meeting is reminded about the process. It was suggested that a flyer go out to new members summarizing some of these procedures.

Harrison pointed out that it would be helpful for people doing petition articles to speak to him before Town Meeting so he could help work out awkward language.

There was also discussion about informing people about how to make motions during Town Meeting. Mary asked for clarification of how many copies of motions to amend were necessary to provide to the moderator. Harrison said it was four.

Peggy asked if it were possible to get deadlines for the preparation of articles pushed back. For example, sometimes the committees' reports come out minutes before Town Meeting. Harrison said he thought the Finance Committee has gotten better about that in recent years. Harrison said with the Right to Farm article, he told supporters that information material had to be out on the table at the session previous to the one when it was to be considered. Aaron said some of the zoning article write-ups were impossible to get out in advance. For example, when petition articles come in close to Town Meeting, then the Planning Board has to have a public hearing on it and that all takes time. Harrison said as a general rule, Town Meeting members have to be able to have time to read about what they're voting on so giving them materials on the night they're voting on it isn't fair; one week to read over materials is better.

There was a discussion about trying to get committees' positions recommending in favor or against articles in advance so that information can be on the Motion Sheet that people receive. Stephanie pointed out that Motion Sheet could include some of the information that is on the script that the moderator and Select Board receive.

Stephanie asked about the Right to Farm article and how the wording on the warrant said the language was on record in the Town Clerk's office, but it wasn't provided to Town Meeting members. Harrison said the law doesn't require all the wording of the bylaw change be provided to Town Meeting members, but he agreed that he didn't like not having the wording. Harrison gave an example of a petition article from years past in

which the language of the proposed bylaw wasn't ready until the night of the proposed vote and he said he wasn't going to hold a vote on it that night since people hadn't had the opportunity to read the language.

Nonny brought up a suggestion from a Town Meeting study from years ago. The suggestion was to send a letter to Town Meeting members who have attended less than 80% of meetings. Harrison said he had at one time sent out a letter to Town Meeting members who had attended less than 50% of meetings saying that it was better to have those seats vacant since you don't need to have as large a quorum. He included a postcard they could send in to the Town Clerk saying they resign. Harrison said the question was whether the moderator could do such a letter or whether TMCC could do it. Nonny suggested that TMCC could do such a letter.

Nonny brought up the issue of precinct meetings, noting that the meeting she went to was monopolized by one person who was not a Town Meeting member. She asked if precinct meetings could be limited to Town Meeting members. Mary said in Precinct 7 & 8 community members sometimes come and become more informed on the issues and it's helpful. Harry said at his precinct meeting Claude makes a list of all articles that people would like to address at the meeting. Peggy said we'll have to have a meeting to talk in more detail about precinct meetings. Carol volunteered to draft an outline of guidelines that could be given to Precinct Meeting hosts. Mary said she was willing to review the outline so we can come to the next meeting with a draft to work from.

3. Minutes: Minor edits were made to the April 22 minutes by Peggy. Harry moved to approve the minutes as amended, the motion was seconded and voted by all those who were members at that time and present at the meeting. Abstaining were new members Aaron, Nonny and Mary.

4. Meeting Times: We decided the next meeting will be the 24th of July, 6:30pm, and August 21, at 6:30pm. We will have elections of officers at the next meeting: secretary, chair, vice-chair and stacker

5. Other issues for next meeting: Peggy reported that \$22 was spent on discs for copies of forums, bus tour, and warrant review.

6. Adjournment: Nonny moved to adjourn, Mary seconded, all voted in favor. We adjourned at 6:10pm.

Carol Gray, Secretary